

Written Testimony of Pamela Puchalski, Project Coordinator
Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee
February 10, 2021

Testimony in support of ***Raised S.B. 837 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF PERFLUOROALKYL OR POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES IN CLASS B FIREFIGHTING FOAM***

Dear Senator Cohen, Representative Borer, Ranking Members Senator Miner, Representative Harding and distinguished members of the Environment Committee,

The Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health (ConnectiCOSH) is a worker health and safety organization that focuses on educating, supporting and protecting workers from workplace hazards. Workplace hazards often include toxic chemicals such as per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). We support ***Raised S.B. 837 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF PERFLUOROALKYL OR POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES IN CLASS B FIREFIGHTING FOAM***.

We have identified that the workplace hazards are the perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances used in Class B Firefighting Foam and the workers whose health and safety we are most concerned with are the firefighters. While these substances are highly effective in firefighting foam to extinguish fuel-based fires, they are also persistent and highly toxic chemicals that exposes firefighters, Connecticut citizens and the environment to dangerous contaminants. Firefighters already have higher rates of specific cancers and those higher cancer rates are being linked to their exposures to various toxins found in burning objects in buildings, and to PFAS substances found in the firefighting gear that they wear with the intent of staying safe when fighting a fire and in the firefighting foam that is aqueous film-foaming (AFFF).

While we understand that AFFF had previously been required for firefighting use at military bases and certain commercial airports, we are also aware that there are safer, yet still highly effective fluorine-free foams available and being used at major airports across the world. In the United States, where there is a lack of federal requirements concerning the use of AFFF, states such as Connecticut are legislating for the use of the safer alternatives. We support the use of safer alternatives and especially support the immediate ban of AFFF for use in firefighting training exercises. We feel that it is deleterious to continue to use these substances since we now know of the irreparable harm that they can cause to the workers, residents and environment in Connecticut.

Besides banning the use of AFFF for training purposes immediately, we would also support that Raised S.B. 837 be passed even though we understand that DEEP and Connecticut's fire administrator have taken sizeable steps in this direction. We recognize the difficulty of removing

and decontaminating already existing AFFF, but are pleased that DEEP has already initiated a take back program which will ensure that all AFFF is removed, stored and ultimately decontaminated properly.

Ultimately, we support a complete ban of AFFF, by 2022. Our first responders, Connecticut citizens and our state's environment require it. We must continue to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals such as PFAS substances so that Connecticut workplaces are safe for all workers and that includes our firefighters.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Pamela Puchalski

Project Coordinator, ConnectiCOSH